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ABSTRACT

At least 17 university faculty members have been the direct objects of unfavorable public commentary by the conservative organization Accuracy in Academia, Inc (AIA). Two case studies that have received much attention involve two political science professors: Dr. Terry Anderson of Texas A & M University, and Dr. Mark Reader of Arizona State University. Dr. Anderson was targeted by AIA reportedly for stating in class that he did not believe in the institution of marriage, that he was an atheist and that he held no patriotic ties with Texas A & M, the flag, or America. Dr. Anderson filed a defamation and libel suit against the organization because the story could affect employability were he to seek another position. Dr. Reader was accused by AIA of using his "Political Ideologies" course as a forum for protesting nuclear armament. Dr. Reader did not respond with a law suit, but rather wrote letters to the American Political Science Association explaining his position, and sought a university policy that would prohibit unregistered individuals ("classroom spies") from attending classes for the purpose of gathering information to be used against the university or individual professors. The actions of AIA have reinforced the beliefs of many in the liberal arts who have denied intellectual standing to much of modern neoconservatism on the grounds that it stifles rather than nurtures intellectual and academic freedom. (Two pages of sources are included.) (JC)

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CASE STUDIES OF THE AIA MOVEMENT

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A recent review of sources cited in INFOTRAC, in The Chronicle of Higher Education, and those major metropolitan newspapers that regularly report on events in academe, shows that at least seventeen faculty members have been the direct object of unfavorable public commentary by the agents of Accuracy in Academia, Inc., either through its newsletter, Campus Report, or in releases picked up by other sources. This means that the teaching or the writing of professionals has been challenged as "inaccurate" by students or others who, for their own unstated reasons, have communicated their challenge to the AIA people. Or, it may mean that AIA has gleaned a story from an intermediate source and spread it to other campuses as an object lesson to anyone who might even consider falling short of AIA standards -- whatever those might be. From the available means, I have chosen two for us to think about today.

The cases I have chosen to talk about are, perhaps predictably, the two that have already received the most widespread publicity, and which constitute examples of opposite ways in which a faculty member might respond to the unsolicited attention of AIA. The first instance is that of Dr. Terry Anderson, a tenured associate professor of political science at Texas A & M University. Second, is the saga of Dr. Mark Reader, also a tenured associate professor of political science, who teaches at Arizona State University. These cases commended themselves to me because you will doubtless have some prior knowledge of the facts, and even more because, taken individually and together, they illustrate some significant aspects of the quixotic and capricious nature of the workings of Accuracy in Academia, Inc.

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Terry Anderson chose to file a defamation and libel suit against AIA because its agents circulated purportedly direct quotations which had been attributed to him in a story originally published in the A & M Batallion. Dr. Anderson was reported to have said, "I do not believe in the institution of marriage. I am an atheist, and I do not claim any political party. I am not patriotic toward Texas A & M, the flag, or America." To this quotation, the AIA column added the editorial speculation that "Lucifer himself could not have formed his credo any better. But such erudite comments make us wonder just what a man does who has no wife or party or country or God." One might respond to the implied query that he lives, as a veteran of service in Vietnam, and teaches political science in College Station, Texas, but that response has only accuracy to commend it.

Of the "couple of hundred student newspapers" to which AIA distributed this column in October, 1985, at least ten printed it as distributed. Among these were the University of Maryland's Diamondback, the Hofstra Chronicle, and the Arizona Daily Wildcat. The Minnesota Daily, checking the accuracy of AIA's column, called Professor Anderson to verify the quotation and confirm some of the asserted facts. When Anderson, who is a Minnesota native and degree holder from the university, said that the quotation was taken out of context and other facts were not true, the Daily did not print the column as distributed, but, as Anderson's attorney, William D. Harper, said, "they communicated the information to the people at the university, and by communicating that message they have 'published' it for purposes of libel law." After asking that AIA retract its statements, suit seeking $50,000 plus legal fees was filed in federal district court in Minneapolis, charging that the story "injured his reputation and 'exposed him to public hatred, ridicule, contempt, and degradation.'" Attorney Harper reported that the case named as

defendants Accuracy in Academia, Inc., Laszlo Csorba III and Matthew O. Scully (writers of the column), the parent organization - Accuracy in Media, Inc., and its chairman, Reed Irvine. The case was not brought, Mr. Harper explained, because of any concern for Anderson's tenured position at Texas A & M, but because the depiction of his client could affect his employability if he were to seek a position elsewhere.

The suit was filed in June, but it was not until July 1 - some eight months after the column was circulated and about two weeks after the suit was filed - that anyone from AIA spoke with Dr. Anderson. In a story carried in the July 9, Chronicle of Higher Education, Scott Heller quoted Les Csorba as saying that the suit was "a frivolous lawsuit and a form of harrassment which we intend to fight." Csorba said further that he had been unable to contact Anderson to check the accuracy of the original Batallion article, and had therefore attributed the quotations to the Campus Review, a religious magazine that had published a story about the Batallion article. That original article had been written by a journalism student as a classroom assignment. Before the suit was filed, Csorba was reported in the February 12, Arizona Daily Wildcat, to have said that Scully "may have attempted to contact Anderson," but that Csorba felt that he had enough verification for the quote because he was only sending it out to campus newspapers, not printing it. Anderson's comment in the July Chronicle, that "If they were really concerned about accuracy they would have called to check their article," is not only a commentary on the name under which they have incorporated, but is in strict accord with libel law, as interpreted by the journalist - attorney who heads the University of Arizona Department of Journalism, George Ridge.

In a letter written to me by Terry Anderson under date of

October 1, 1986, he told me that two law firms representing AIA had initiated action in August to get the case moved from Minneapolis to Texas or Washington, D.C. Neither Anderson nor Harper favors this move, given that Anderson was raised and attended the university in Minneapolis, that Harper practices there, and that they feel a jury trial would be more comfortable for them there than in either other location. The request to change location is being heard by a judge in Minneapolis this month. Thus the wheels of justice grind not only exceeding fine, but at a ponderous rate.

I should add that my letter from Dr. Anderson was posted in Selangor, Maylasia, where he is teaching this year at the Texas Cooperative Project at the Institut Teknologi Mara. He commented that "since August I have not thought of Ed Meese, Ron Reagan, the Texas budget and cuts at my institution, or AIA." Personally, I believe that he has earned his respite from those sources of stress. We shall return to Dr. Anderson for some comparisons after highlighting the AIA actions regarding Dr. Reader.

Dr. Mark Reader really represents the AIA's cause celebre. In fact, he functioned, unwittingly and unwillingly, as the putting green or the practice tee for one of the two staff people who became co-editors of the Campus Report.

One portion of the portfolio submitted by Matthew Scully as he sought employment at AIA was comprised of columns written as he was opinion editor of the State Press, the student paper at Arizona State University. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the first issue of Campus Report was aimed at Scully's old target, Professor Reader. His job for that issue was simply to rewrite and echo the editorial content already aimed at Reader during Scully's seven-year, 192 credit, undergraduate

career that was terminated with less than a 2.0 grade point average, and without a baccalaureate degree.

It is not really difficult to understand how Arizona State University, without any national reputation as a hotbed of liberalism, became the only institution to provide two faculty members for the AIA Hall of Infamy. Beyond the simple fact of Matthew Scully's move from the minor league State Press to the majors as an AIA staff member for about a year, is the more important information that Scully's ASU apprenticeship had been facilitated by contributions to successful "Peace Through Strength" candidates for student government positions. These contributions were made by Charles Keating, Jr., of Phoenix. Mr. Keating was, and perhaps still is, a member of the board of Accuracy in Media, Inc., and of Citizens for Decency Through Law, an anti-pornography organization based in Phoenix. Mr. Keating does not carry the conservative banner in Phoenix alone. Bear in mind that the Valley of the Sun is also the present or past home address for Barry Goldwater, Richard Kleindienst, Robert Mardian, William Rehnquest, and Nancy Reagan's mother.

In his paper entitled "Political Theory and Political Ideology: The Role of Accuracy in Academia," presented last August to the American Political Science Association, Professor Reader identifies fourteen distinct issue-positions and organizational responsibilities which he has taken during the past twenty years that would. almost inevitably, draw the fire of the jingoist supporters of massive armament and of all things nuclear. The thrust of the AIA challenge to Reader was, uniquely, couched in terms of "accuracy." In his letter to the editor of the New York Times, November 13, 1985, Reed Irvine (Chair of Accuracy in Media) charged that Dr. Reader "uses [Political Science 101, entitled "Political Ideologies" and described in the college catalog as intended to deal with 'leading

political ideas and belief systems"] as a soapbox to indoctrinate students with his obsessive fear of all things nuclear." Mr Irvine expressed his concern that students were misled by the catalog description, and that assigned readings dealt only with one side of a controversial issue. "Surely," Irvine concluded, "freshmen at Arizona State University ought to be entitled to some outside help when confronted with teachers who insist on inflicting inaccurate information on them."

Professor Reader's mode of responding to this intrusion into his classroom, first by Scully on the State Press staff, and then by Scully on the AIA staff, was first to explore with others in the political science department the possibility of excluding people from the classroom who were not registered for the course. His then-department chair inquired of a student affairs administrator regarding the existence of a university policy concerning classroom access. She replied that no policy existed so it was not possible to exclude student journalists who sought occasional stories. Parenthetically, it occurs to me that if the inquiry had been sent to the Registrar, or to the Vice President for Financial Affairs -- that is, to those concerned with collecting tuition and fees -- justification might well have been found for admitting only those officially registered. But such was not the case, and Mr. Scully, who was not registered in Dr. Reader's course, gained his insights through occasional visits and rumor.

When Matthew Scully went national, Professor Reader responded. He sought support from the national professional associations whose concern it is to provide support for members of the professoriat, and to protect their academic interests -- he wrote to the American Association of University Professors, and to the American Political Science Association. To them he cited the use of classroom spies, and the threat to academic freedom, and to free speech in general. His APSA paper details the ways in which

his course is organized and presented. Had either Scully or Irvine taken the course, Reader concluded, instead ofrelying on random visits and partial exposure to the readings, he would have had more accurate information and less to comment on.

The national publicity generated by an October 21, 1985, New York Times story, and an editorial published five days later, moved the president of Arizona State University to issue a statement challenging the practice of random classroom surveillance. Such timing, after maintaining a discrete silence while the matter was limited to campus concern, lends some credence to Dr. Reader's somewhat cynical opinion that President Nelson might have acted more from concern lest ASU return to the AAUP List of Censured Institutions after a lapse of only a year ot two, than from a heartfelt desire to bolster the cause of academic freedom.

In April, 1986, Matthew Scully resigned from his AIA responsibilities, reportedly in order to travel Europe. Scott Heller reported in the October 22 Chronicle that Les Csorba plans to pursue a doctorate in political science at Georgrtown University on a part time basis, while continuing to work for Accuracy in Academia. Campus Report has shifted its editorial pattern from targeting a professor in each issue to what Scott Heller described as focusing on "scholarly controversies and free-speech issues, usually involving conservatives, making the publication something of a milder, national version of an ideological student paper like the Dartmouth Review." The AIA has abandoned its initial goal of recruiting classroom monitors, for whatever combination of reasons, and the firestorm of November 1985 seems mostly smoke in November, 1986.

We have seen here the opposite modes of response to the AIA operation: legal confrontation and refusal to dignify unwarranted

accusation with a direct response. We do not yet know what the outcome will be from the libel suit, but we can be fairly certain of an additional increment in the annals of libel law.

Dr. Reader believes that it was his refusal not to legitimate the AIA in any way that was at least one of the most important reasons that he became a target. He refused to respond to some eighteen phone calls to his office. He also angered Reed Irvine by haging up the phone on him when Irvine called Reader at home at 9:30 p.m. on Friday, October 11, 1985 -- which, Dr. Reader points out in his paper, was 12:30 a.m. in Washington D.C. This act, which Irvine had surreptitiously taped, was in accord with a long-standing bias of Dr. Reader's. He reported in his paper that he had earlier told a reporter for an ASU alternative student paper that "I have never trusted the judgment of those who do politics into the wee hours of a weekend morning, and who are so blinded by their political passions as to lose all sense of balance and human proportion."

Dr. Anderson's case, thus far, has been, in a large sense, "put on hold." Dr. Reader acknowledges"some speaking engagements, a possible television-movie offer, and an original Doonsbury cartoon mocking A.I.A., autographed by the artist, Gary Trudeau," as Scott Heller noted in his October 22, Chronicle update. In his AFSA paper, Dr. Reader sums up his response to AIA thus, "Quite simply, while others around the country were debating, and thus legitimating, AIA spokespersons as they prepared for their frontal assault on the academy, I decided not to invite the tyrant to tea, as I had been told one colleague had already done. And that, I think, made all the difference."

On a more general note, I find it easy to agree with Dr. Reader as he observes, "AIA's performance in academia, I believe,

justifies the good judgment of those in Liberal Arts education who have steadfastly denied intellectual standing to much of modern neo-conservatism on the grounds that its leading exponents have never learned how to learn and that the prime function of their use of language is to conceal rather than reveal the case." We in rhetoric and communication, the traditional handmaiden to politics since the classic days of the Organon might well ponder the efficacy of the rhetoric of silence as we consider with Professor Tedford the "Chilling Effects and Appropriate Responses" of and to Accuracy in Academia.

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